

BUILDING THE NATION'S FUTURE

Former Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood on transportation,
economic success, and parking.





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Ray LaHood was U.S. Secretary of Transportation from 2009 to 2013. There, he held responsibility for the oversight of air, maritime, and surface transportation in the U.S.; 55,000 employees; and a \$70 billion budget. He developed a reputation for being devoted to safety and fighting distracted driving.

Previously, LaHood was a U.S. Representative from Illinois, where he was a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and House Appropriations Committee.

He is currently co-chair of Building America's Future, a bipartisan coalition of current and former elected officials working to raise awareness about the need to re-invest in roads, support transportation infrastructure, and keep the Highway Trust Fund solvent.

LaHood recently sat down with *The Parking Professional* to talk about the future of transportation and what role the parking industry will play moving forward.

The Parking Professional: The transportation world is seeing great change from the introduction of technologies such as driverless cars, highway sensors, and automated road systems. In terms of infrastructure over the next five to 15 years, what do you see as the

hot buttons or technologies that will most affect those who manage and use America's transportation systems?

RAY LAHOOD: Before we can get excited about the country adopting the newest transportation technologies, we need to make sure that we are on par with what the rest of the world has been doing for decades. We've been falling behind our competitors in so many ways.

For example, the United States must invest in high-speed rail. We have to follow Europe's lead and provide the next generation of transportation by building high-speed rail networks across this country. Likewise, driverless cars for everyone on main roadways are still years away, but we have the technology now to make the cars we drive ourselves better and more fuel-efficient.

I've said it before: All families will have some kind of hybrid or electric vehicle by 2025. The future is now for these technologies, before automated

systems and driverless prototypes become more road-ready.

TPP: Building America's Future is focused on improving the U.S. transportation infrastructure to improve overall quality of life. What are your first priorities in that area?

RL: One of the most important reasons for investing in American infrastructure is ensuring that the United States remains an economically competitive and viable global leader. Over the years, we have been passed by developing countries who manage to invest more capital into their roads, bridges, aviation, transportation systems, and ports than we do. We need to ensure that our country remains economically competitive, and crumbling infrastructure makes investors less inclined to invest here.

Infrastructure investment is intricately linked to quality of life for these reasons; infrastructure and economic growth go hand-in-hand.

TPP: A significant percentage of congestion in urban areas and cities is caused by drivers looking for parking, and most cars spend more than 90 percent of their time parked. The parking industry has embraced new strategies and technologies, such as sensors, reservation systems, and navigational apps that take drivers directly to available spots to try and combat congestion. What role do you see parking playing in the greater overhaul of the transportation system? How can parking and transportation administrators and planners best work together?

RL: You are right—congestion in urban areas is amplified by a scarcity of parking options. In cities, cruising for a parking spot can slow down traffic to maddening levels. To mitigate these troubles, private parking companies must be encouraged to continue growth in downtown areas, while high-volume roadways should work to create fewer free or short-term parking spaces that lead to excessive cruising.

As you mentioned, private companies have been leading the charge in creating new technologies around making parking easier in urban areas, and they must be allowed to continue to do so through public investment in parking and transportation technologies. Transportation and parking are interrelated, and the government should help to mitigate congestion by encouraging further innovation by these private enterprises.

TPP: You recently joined the board of directors of a company that manufactures electric buses. How important is it for the parking industry to embrace sustainable measures such as electric vehicle (EV) charging/alternate fuels, efficient lighting, and automated systems that reduce idling?

RL: It is crucial to implement sustainable measures and increased environmental awareness across all industries, and the parking industry can work to be a leader in this field.

EV charging in parking structures can help to encourage citizens to buy electric vehicles, because they see how convenient the charging stations can be. EV is undoubtedly the future of transit; it is cost-efficient and good for the environment. Having accessible charging stations is one roadblock



to getting more EVs on the road; therefore, having the parking industry lead the way in providing convenient charging stations is vitally important.

Automated systems can help to lessen emissions and work to make the parking experience more efficient, which, in turn, leads to a more satisfying parking experience overall. Drivers want the most efficient, quickest parking experience possible, and these advancements help to keep car owners satisfied and happy with their parking experience in the 21st century.

TPP: A priority of IPI's has been to secure a seat at the urban and transportation planning table for parking professionals, so that parking becomes part of the first steps of infrastructure planning and not an afterthought. From your perspective, is that an important role for parking? If so, how can our industry promote it as a priority to others?

RL: Absolutely. Parking affects air and water in many of the same ways as other infrastructure development projects and should therefore be thoughtfully included in initial infrastructure planning processes. Holistic inclusion of the parking industry can radically reduce parking woes later on down the line.

TPP: It's often said that one of the top stumbling blocks to getting drivers out of their cars and onto mass transit is that they simply like driving themselves. How can we overcome that to encourage more efficient commuting?

RL: A fact that commuters know all too well is that time and money are precious. Each year, the average D.C.-area commuter spends more than 60 hours sitting in his or her car,

stuck in traffic. The congestion cost per driver from all this sitting in traffic adds up to nearly \$1,000 in extra gasoline expenditures for the average commuter, not to mention the costs of maintaining a car.

All this wasted time and money could be spent with or on their families, or at work being more productive. If these numbers can be driven home for these commuters in areas where public transportation is so much more viable, affordable and, above all, faster, commuters can be encouraged to pull out of this terrible traffic congestion and try something much more efficient in every way imaginable.

TPP: What is your overall vision for the future of parking and transportation? Where are your biggest priorities?

RL: My biggest priorities include fixing our pothole-riddled roads and crumbling bridges all across America.

Each day, millions of Americans drive across structurally deficient infrastructure, and yet infrastructure investment is not a priority in Washington. Modernizing American infrastructure to an internationally competitive level is my biggest priority. Investing in infrastructure plans that have smartly integrated parking blueprints is a crucial part of modernizing infrastructure and stopping urban bottlenecks.

By increasing availability of parking options near busy destinations, we can help slow the sprawl of congestion. It is necessary and forward-looking to integrate parking policy and transportation policy in urban planning projects.

TPP: From a personal perspective, what makes for a great parking experience?

RL: Finding a spot right in front of the place you want to go, of course! 